

April 24: A RAW Record

OMAHA—*Monday Night Raw*, recovering from a significant ratings slip during the fourth quarter in 1994, rolled to an all-time audience high for its April 24 live airing.

Paced by the WWF title bout between Diesel (Kevin Nash) and Bam Bam (Scott Bigelow, *Raw* rolled to a 3.9 rating and 5.8 per cent share of audience. The show was seen in 2.28 million homes in a combination of its east coast and west coast feeds, largest audience for a weekly episode of a wrestling series in the history of cable television.

The 3.9 rating—best outing in the two-year history of the show—also powered the Monday night USA Network staple to a 5.8 per cent share of audience, its top share percentage ever in the 9 p.m. time period.

In the post-1988 period, considered a benchmark for cable television, when major services passed the 40-million homes mark, the five top-rated weekly series episodes are:

1. *WCW Main Event*, Feb. 1990, 4.4
2. *WCW Main Event*, Feb. 1990; and *WWF Prime Time*, Aug. 1989, 4.1 (tie)
4. *World Championship Wrestling*, Feb. 1990; and *WWF Prime Time*, July 1990, 4.0 (tie).

MATWATCH '95

MARCH/APRIL/EARLY SPRING

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On Wide World

SI Report: No New Ground



For the hardcore fan, *Sports Illustrated TV's* report on steroids in wrestling broke little new ground in its April 29 airing on ABC's *Wide World of Sports*. But the story may well have reinforced negative images of the mat industry in non-fans.

Scheduled amidst an afternoon of gymnastic competition on *Wide World*, the story—reported by *SI's* Michael Farber—used the recent deaths of Eddie Gilbert, Art Barr and John (Studd) Minton as a springboard to explore the issue of steroids in wrestling. While not outright tying the deaths of Gilbert and Barr to steroids, the implication was clear within Farber's piece.

If any new information was revealed not previously investigated by Dave Meltzer in *The Wrestling Observer*, Farber declared Barr "dead...of an overdose." A coroner's report never publicly tied Barr's death last fall to substance abuse, though the speculation has existed in some newsletters and on computer services.

Interviews aired featured Jim "Ultimate Warrior" Hellwig, who admitted—as he did at the Vince McMahon trial last summer—using steroids to build his mat career; Minton's physician, Dr. Roy Beveridge; Gilbert's ex-wife, Melissa "Missy" Hiatt; and former WWF wrestler David Shults. Representatives of both the World Wrestling Federation and World Championship Wrestling denied Farber's request for interviews.

The story was clearly tailored for the non-fan, subtly suggesting wrestling executives care little more for the well-being of performers beyond the success of their characters.

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The 3.9 was the top mark for a weekly series since the *Prime Time* 4.0 nearly five years ago. The rating also ties another previous *Prime Time* and two episodes of *World Championship Wrestling* for sixth place on the all-time post-1988 ratings list for weekly series.

The episode capped an April surge which has not stopped since *Wrestlemania*, with *Raw* finishing for the month with a 3.7 average, the best one-month figure since a 3.8 for *WCW Main Event* in February 1990.

On the other hand, *WCW Saturday Night* could only pull a 2.5 rating on the same weekend, despite a strong 5.8 share. The TBS flagship series, with this past Saturday's episode left to figure, has only managed a 2.2 average during April, only one-tenth of a point higher than the April numbers when Eric Bischoff took over creative reins of the company.

One key WWF insider says the reason for the momentum with *Raw* is far stronger viewer interest post-*Wrestlemania* than *WCW* gained from its *Uncensored* show.

Kim Kersey, a top cable operator with Cablevision Industries, chalks up the reason for the poor *Wrestlemania* buy-rate to the high price. "It was just too much for many middle-of-the-road buyers to fork over \$35 (or \$40 on the day of the show)," said Kersey. "But that doesn't mean it didn't result in interest for their TV shows after the pay-per-view."

SI Report: No New Ground

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Hellwig said in the report he had suffered no immediate health effects from the use of steroids. "It's easy for me to say now in front of everybody that I took them for a purpose," said Hellwig, "because that purpose that I had, that desire that I had to be something became a reality and I became a success."

Hiatt questioned how Gilbert could have died alone in his Puerto Rico apartment. "I don't have that many tapes of him but I sat up all night and watched some old tapes of him and it made me feel good," said Hiatt, tearfully referring to the Feb. 18 night she received the news of Gilbert's death. "So, at least he's on tape and at least people can enjoy his work and enjoy some of the stuff he did."

Farber drew a contrast between the massive mainline sports journalism interest in the death of former Boston Celtics star Reggie Lewis of a heart attack in 1993. "Questions about the circumstances of his death persist to this day," said Farber. "But there seems to be little interest in Art Barr's death or the cause of Gilbert's heart attack. It's an issue wrestling would rather avoid."

Hiatt charged wrestling executives have little concern with the well-being of competitors, aside from the success of their mat performances. "They wouldn't do anything different. They wouldn't bat an eye. They wouldn't take five minutes in the morning. They would go on with their day," contended Hyatt. "Because they see people are dispensable and they don't care. One character—we can go anywhere and find anyone, put paint on his face, put him out there and call him, what, the Ultimate Surprise?"

Unlike Hiatt, Shults did not lay the blame on the powers of wrestling. "Nobody put a gun to these guys' arms and made them take steroids," said Shults. They took steroids because they wanted to be a hero. They wanted to be a big name. They wanted to be somebody."

But Shults said the peer pressure was significant. "Everybody did it. What am I gonna do, be an oddball, say no? I wouldn't have had a job, either," he told Farber. "If you didn't do 'em, you're not gonna be on top, you're not gonna make money. You may have a job but you're not gonna make money."

Dr. Beveridge likened most of Minton's lymphoma and other illnesses to possible side-effects from steroids. "He had a number of events in his care which was very suggestive to me that he had used steroids," said the physician. "His pituitary did not work well. He had diabetes. He had some bone problems."

Hiatt pointed to the serial effect of viewers toward wrestlers. "I'm sure the casual fan doesn't know that Hot Stuff Eddie Gilbert passed away because so many people come and go, just like characters on your favorite soap operas....oh, he'll turn up on another soap opera," Hiatt said.

Hellwig acknowledged he may have shortened his own life-span by using anabolic substances when he said, "Only the Big Man upstairs knows how much time was taking off my life in my own personal circumstances by doing steroids."

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Steve

BEVERLY

When this meager bit of space is finished, you can make your own decision whether the words here are measured or mean-spirited. Hopefully, they will be somewhere in the middle.

I have been asked by a number of people who have missed getting our recently-sporadic issues of this publication when I am going to finally take off the gloves on a subject, as in the *Matwatch* of old. Candidly, when one passes the age of 40 and sees parenthood impending, once-fiery emotions often mellow.

However, I have a few things to say in this current column. I will say them one time and one time only, no matter what is said or written about them or me—and I would not be surprised if they are addressed in at least one quarter.

An old cliché suggests, "Never, never, never answer your critics." About 99 per cent of the time, that is fairly good advice. For one thing, one usually succeeds in merely elevating the attention of the critic in question. Second, I steadfastly maintain that with a limited number of exceptions, readers don't buy publications to sample that kind of conflict. One's memory is not too short to remember back to 1988 when Dave Meltzer's "Readers' Pages" were suddenly transformed into subscribers potshotting each other with reckless abandon. Dave finally felt compelled to change his letters policy to reduce the sniping.

At least some of you who are multi-newsletter subscribers are aware of a less-than-subtle exhortation I recently received from a columnist for another publication. Frankly, I haven't seen the paper (as the columnist likewise does not subscribe to mine) for more than two years and would have been ignorant of the remarks had not a close friend chosen to read them to me.

Nonetheless, both the long and the short of it is the writer has deemed I am less than a stellar human being because of the perspective I chose to take on the death of Eddie Gilbert and has chosen publicly to say so. Supposedly, I "protected" Eddie at selected points during his career and such decisions, in this writer's words—which he chose to portray as fact, rather than opinion—led to the supposed downfall of the original version of this publication.

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Steve

BEVERLY

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Apparently, since, in the writer's eye, I failed to condemn Eddie for every sin he ever committed and revive every old sore in the Gilbert files, including stomping on the dirt in the man's casket, I have been impugned as both a commentator, much less a member of the human race.

Aside from the fans of this writer—who through the years has found very little he likes about anything, an objective eye would suggest the tone of the entire column was one gigantic, "I told you so," with more than a small tablespoon of celebration about the past journalistic triumphs this individual has achieved in taking a scalpel to Gilbert's life, dating back to his departure from World Championship Wrestling in 1990 and possibly before.

That takes immense courage and class to publicly chortle about such previous victories of editorial excellence at the time of a man's death. The kind of courage one can hide behind with pen and paper. I wonder how much fortitude this same individual would have possessed to say those same words face-to-face to a grieving Peggy Gilbert as she turned away from the Memorial Gardens of Lexington, Tn.

Let me address a few issues which are of tantamount importance to me. First and foremost, what this individual thinks, believes, or professes about the reasons for the ending of the first version of *Matwatch* are inconsequential. I have long since come to the conclusion, from some of his other efforts, he is going to write what he wants to write, regardless of whether he knows the truth or whether his opinions remotely resemble the truth. People can choose to believe it or not and there is precious little I can do to control that, nor do I lose much sleep over it, since wrestling is increasingly a miniscule part of my life. The columnist suggests we folded in 1992 because of a loss of faith from our readership. In the famous words of the former mayor of Columbus, Ga., Frank Martin, during the time of a false accusation against him: "If he says so." I think the reasons for *Matwatch's* departure were well-documented at the time. Those who know me and those reasons know the difference between fantasy and truth. Those who don't can make their own judgments.

As for the issue of "protecting" Eddie Gilbert, I would suggest to anyone that no human being alive can protect a person who does not seek help from self-destruction. As if it were necessary to rehash—and as I clearly stated in the previous issue, the weekly newsletters were going to sharply document the life of Eddie Gilbert; hence, my decision to choose a personal perspective of the sides of Eddie few people saw—Eddie Gilbert had several bouts with drugs. Eddie took painkillers and muscle relaxers. More than likely, the effect of those and other difficul-

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SI Report Lacks Punch

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Dr. Beveridge alluded to the invincibility many athletes feel when starting steroids. "People start it. They feel better and they're gonna keep doing it because they don't pay the price for a long time," said Beveridge. "It's analogous to tobacco use, smoking. You feel good when you're smoking when you're young. It's not until you're 50 or 60 that you pay the price."

Farber's only other reference to WCW and the WWF was to detail both groups' claims of having steroid testing policies in place. However, Hulk Hogan was pictured on several occasions during the six-and-a-half minute report while Farber discussed steroids. Among the sequences was from a WCW Center Stage show of last year with Hogan butting the heads of Ric Flair and Sherri Martel together.

ANALYSIS

To have anticipated any breakthroughs not previously uncovered in the wrestling media or by columnists such as Phil Mushnick would be virtually an insult because the steroid/wrestling connection has taken years of journalistic enterprise to unfold. A brief magazine-length report on a sports anthology show only widens the exposure to past reporting.

What the story did accomplish was in focusing on three celebrated deaths in wrestling to highlight a problem many believe will continue to exist because of a lack of past enforcement in WCW and the temptation of wrestlers who drop off the Big Two circuits into the independents.

The story had an interesting choice of interview subjects. Hiatt, as Gilbert's ex-wife, portrayed more sincerity than I have ever seen and her emotions appeared genuine. Dr. Beveridge was quietly matter-of-fact about the powderkeg faced by athletes who cycle onto steroids. Jim Hellwig made no apologies about his anabolic past but was philosophical enough to admit he may have played with a time bomb. But Dave Shults, who always seems to be available for these stories, was a question mark. He has not been an active wrestler for ten years and sheds virtually no new light. Shults likely was chosen because of the story being on ABC and the reference to his slapping of John Stossel in 1985 on 20/20. Farber discussed Shults being "written out of wrestling" after the Stossel incident.

Of course, to imply deaths or serious illnesses from steroids or other drugs in mailine sports perpetually draw great concern from coaches and executives is also fallacious. Still unanswered is the question of how much Lefty Driesell knew or cared about Len Bias' problem before his tragic death. There's the issue of the Major League Baseball Players Association which has backed the perpetual reinstatements of baseball's most habitual drug abuser, Steve Howe, who has had more chances than vowel-buyers on *Wheel of Fortune*. Nonetheless, wrestling likely ignores its own more than any genre of the entertainment business.

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Steve Beverly

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ties led to strains in his personal life, including his three marriages. Yet, even through those trials, at least two of the ex-wives were distraught at the news of Eddie's death. While many of you are aware I have frequently been at odds with Melissa Hiatt, the emotion she displayed in last weekend's ABC interview was as genuine and unchoreographed as I have ever seen in Missy. Had she chosen to, she could have said many potentially damaging things about Eddie. She refrained, out of respect for the Gilbert family.

Many of us saw the tell-tale signs of Eddie's behavioral mystique as long as two years before his death. I probably only saw him face-to-face twice in the last two-and-a-half years of his life. Both times were congenial and cordial. Yet, appointment after appointment was made to meet for lunch or breakfast at designated locations and Eddie would not show, nor call for an explanation. Another acquaintance, J.D. McKay, who has deeply researched biographical material on Eddie, shared much the same story with me last fall. Yes, Eddie's fate was largely brought on himself. So the word "protect" hardly applies. One can't protect anyone, journalistically or otherwise, who appears intent on bringing on self-doom. But does that suggest he should have been abandoned even by people he shunned? The columnist, whom I have never met, would have you believe my responsibility would have been to totally reject Gilbert, then publicly denounce him in the strongest of terms. I suppose, then, I, too, could have written a column chortling about how "I told you so."

Is all of this fodder for wrestling newsletters? Depends on your perspective. The writer, whom I have taken another of his several opportunities to castigate me, did not spend nearly an hour on the telephone with Eddie's mother the day after his death as she sobbed her way through searching for answers about her son and, if you will, bitterness at the wrestling industry itself. He didn't see a struggling Tommy Gilbert at the funeral or read or hear Tommy's words in the Jackson newspaper as he struggled to understand why Eddie could not find peace for himself. Tommy valiantly hoped Eddie would have been elected to the county court clerk's seat he sought last fall because he saw so many things eating up Eddie inside. The writer didn't see the tears of a sister and her children who will not see Uncle Eddie come home again. Further, the same writer did not sit through an hour-long funeral service where the predominance of those in attendance were challenged to examine their own lives in the wake of Eddie's tragedy. I would like to believe the pro wrestling people in that church would take the minister's words to heart but, sadly, most probably put the message behind them fifteen minutes after they drove away from the cemetery.

If having an occasional heart makes one a poor journalist, then I wholeheartedly plead guilty. I simply do not find it easy to sit on a perch in North Carolina and fire potshots at the world as if I were target practicing. I have my moments when I analyze someone as an overrated announcer or strongly take issue with one on matters of executive decisions. However, these same individuals are also people with families, friends and personal lives and the most tasteless act of cowardice—written, verbal, or thought—is to celebrate over their personal misfortunes. For a person, even in as insignificant a part of life as a wrestling newsletter, to chant an "I told you so" over another's death is

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SI Report

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Farber did point a sharp finger, though at the industry in general, rather than specific people, by suggesting wrestling would rather avoid dealing with the questions of the three deaths, instead of cleaning up its act.

In the report, Farber acknowledged both of the Big Two wrestling groups now claim to

have steroid testing policies in place, though no specifics were given as to the frequency of testing, nor of potential penalties delivered for positive tests. The casual viewer would potentially gain the impression of strict and regular testing with specific punishment.

Will the report make any difference? Hardly. The primary audience of *Wide World of Sports* probably had heard of Minton as John Studd but knew little about Gilbert or Barr, since neither had been a regular in the last decade in the WWF. Further, the issue appears to be far more of passion within the hardcore element of newsletter writers and subscribers than within the general public, many of whom still don't even understand the nature or potential harm of steroids.

Remember Stossel's 20/20 report, which was considered within the mat industry the lightning rod which blew the lid off of "protecting" the business? It merely resulted in increased curiosity and a jump in ticket sales over the ensuing 18 months. Non-wrestling fans consider the mat business to be a non-entity, as it is. We'll need more than a six-and-a-half minute spot, even on a network sports series, to erase the tide and damage of steroids in wrestling.

Steve Beverly

(Continued from left column)

to be pitied, if not beyond contempt. This writer has his followers and I am certain they gave him a cheerleading boost for his efforts. I wonder if they would have similar emotions had he been analyzing the aftermath of one of their relatives' deaths in the same manner.

As for the attempts in the piece to further discredit me or my publication, which has been a perpetual sport for this guy for several years now, I'll simply answer in this fashion. *Matwatch '95* is hardly a threat to be the next major force in American entertainment journalism, nor was it ever. And while a few of this guy's followers are probably among those who wrote Dave Meltzer, suggesting he "distance" himself from me when we went into The Real Wrestling Hotline venture, you who read my work can either accept it or reject it for what it is.

As for the continued attempts at character assassination from this guy, most of you have demonstrated the faith in me to ignore him because you understand this man has never met me, nor attempted to contact me, and has only been conversant with me once—by telephone on a radio program in which I was not informed he was to be involved. So, he doesn't really know me.

But if there is a question, all I will say is ask my students, ask the young lady whose career I'm helping guide on the road to becoming a potential breakthrough female sportscaster, ask the people in my church or those involved in my community activities, ask my wife of 15 years, or the ten-year-old and five-year-old who are about to become our daughters. None of these will be objective—but I think they know me better than my critic.

Steve Beverly



Pay Revenues For '95 Rated \$75 Million

WASHINGTON, DC—Pay-per-view revenues for professional wrestling will likely reach the \$75 million in 1995, according to a top industry estimate.

Broadcasting and Cable magazine reported in its April 10 edition boxing and wrestling will continue to lead the way in pay subscriptions with the mat game running second to championship fights.

According to magazine sources, the estimate does not include revenue from peripheral events, such as The Ultimate Fighting Championship, which is not considered pure wrestling by the cable industry. Nor was the estimate including the additional pay-per-view shows scheduled by the World Wrestling Federation or World Championship Wrestling after the first quarter.

Dupree Decks Mat for Arena

MEMPHIS—Former Oklahoma and USFL running back Marcus Dupree has left the USWA, per orders of his Memphis Pharoahs Arena Football team.

Dupree, the most heavily recruited high school back in America in 1982 after a storied career in Philadelphia, Ms., had appeared for a month on the Memphis USWA television show in a moderate push, teamed with David Haskins.

However, the Pharoahs reportedly upped Dupree's guarantee and directed him to stay out of the ring or forfeit the contract.

Backhaul Open For Raw, Syndie

NEW YORK—Monday Night Raw and WWF Superstars are now frequently available live on backhaul feeds for dish owners.

Raw and Superstars have both been spotted on the Ku-band GStar-4 satellite on various transponders. The recent Sid Vicious-Shawn Michaels angle was seen on the backhaul feed live during a Raw commercial break.

The edited syndicated versions are now fed Thursdays at 5 p.m. EDT (Superstars and Challenge, Canadian versions) on C-band satellite Galaxy 4, channel 11; and Fridays at 12 noon (U.S. versions), Telstar 401, channel 16.



A GREAT VICTORY

No matter your view of it as a show, the performance of Monday Night Raw is worth kudos from this quarter. After a guardedly declining fourth quarter in 1994, Raw has rung the bell with the viewers in the four weeks immediately after Wrestlemania to set an all-time audience ratings record.

As detailed in our lead story, the 3.9/5.8 posted by Raw on April 24 were both show records and the 2.27 million homes were the most ever to tune in to a single episode of a weekly wrestling series in the history of cable television.

While the other weekend shows appeared to have a few brief flurries of audience interest in the late winter, none have gained the momentum of Raw as a measure of appointment television with wrestling viewers. WCW has all but abandoned its frequent live "interactive" telecasts after the weak main events it influenced viewers to approve failed to register sharp rating increases.

No small measure of the Raw surge can be attributed to the producing of Jim Ross, the guy WCW allowed to get away. Or to the fact that even with Hulk Hogan helming in Atlanta, he cannot overcome a weaker talent base and uninspired television shows as a ratings draw.

Any organization which breaks an audience record of any kind in today's increasingly-crowded cable environment has to be congratulated. The only question remaining: can Raw become the first weekly series to hit a 4 in five years?

THE HIGH PRICE OF BUSINESS

At issue as we went to deadline is whether Wrestlemania, despite its disappointing buy-rate, broke the all-time single-event wrestling revenue record for pay-per-view. Top cable operator Tele-Communications, Inc., is estimating a 1.1 buy-rate (271,000 subscribers, \$9.8 million) but TCI is frequently conservative.

Multichannel News, the cable industry prime independent analyst is predicting a 1.5 when all reports are in (340,000, \$12.2 million). Regardless, either figure is well below the anticipation of as high as a 2.2 in the week before the show.

From this quarter, the problem was not with the focus on an ex-NFL star, Lawrence Taylor, which overshadowed whatever strength the Diesel-Shawn Michaels WWF title match may have otherwise had. The problem was with cost.

This was the most expensive pay-per-view in history and the \$34.95 price tag (\$39.95 on the day of the show) was simply beyond the means or common sense of many middle-class families for a wrestling show. Frankly, \$29.95 is a stretch but is still possible for a show with the tradition of Mania. However, we have strongly contended the \$19.95-24.95 range is the peak price beyond which pay-per-view creates diminishing return. WCW is going to discover this on the next Hulk Hogan show which costs \$33 for a same-day subscription.

It is our view that Titan Sports should take a more realistic look at the cost ledger. Vince McMahon's people will see far more people joining the pay ranks (as long as they aren't considered throwaway shows) for its upcoming series of \$14.95 events. If the company is to be as fan-friendly as Titan claims it is attempting to be, it should consider that when it sets the price tag for pay-cable.

HOWARD COSELL

He was the man millions loved to hate....and he was equally respected for his devotion to the truth. Why a remembrance, albeit brief, of Howard Cosell in a wrestling bulletin? Howard had a few connections to wrestling.

On Wide World of Sports in 1977, Cosell described the now-infamous Muhammad Ali-Gorilla Monsoon and Ali-Buddy Wolff workouts with a wink as he quoted promoters calling the exhibitions "all perfectly legitimate." In his book, I Never Played the Game, he describes in colorful language his rejection of Vince McMahon's offer for him to become a lead commentator with the WWF. His final book, What's Wrong with Sports?, matter-of-factly points to pro wrestlers as the biggest users and abusers of steroids in sports.

Howard Cosell may have owned an ego which at times put him above the events he covered. But he was perhaps the best ever to step behind a sports microphone in using the language and packing a punch with his opinions. He didn't revere the games he covered; he analyzed them honestly. And he did not hesitate to criticize his own medium, which increased his enemies during the final years of his career.

His departure from sports broadcasting left a wide gap long before his death. Too bad Howard was one of a kind. Because most of today's cheerleading, hyping, everything-is-a-great-play mainline sports commentators are often no better than those in wrestling at whom they look down their noses. The outcomes just aren't pre-planned.

THE RATINGS PAGE

CABLE WRESTLING RATINGS

JANUARY AVERAGES

	Rating/Share	Total Homes
Mon. Night Raw	2.7/3.9	1.66 million
WCW Sat. Night	2.4/5.0	1.47 million
WWF Action Zone	1.7/4.6	1.06 million
WCW Pro	1.6/5.6	993,000
WCW Main Event	1.6/3.1	988,000
WWF Mania	1.3/4.0	808,000

COMBINED AVG.

WWF	1.9/4.2	1.19 million
WCW	1.87/4.6	1.16 million

FEBRUARY AVERAGES

	Rating/Share	Total Homes
Mon. Night Raw	3.1/4.8	1.95 million
WCW Sat. Night	2.5/5.3	1.54 million
WCW Main Event	1.9/3.7	1.19 million
WWF Action Zone	1.75/5.4	1.09 million
WCW Pro	1.7/6.4	1.04 million
WWF Mania	1.4/4.1	889,000

COMBINED AVG.

WWF	2.1/4.4	1.29 million
WCW	2.0/5.1	1.25 million

MARCH AVERAGES

	Rating/Share	Total Homes
Monday Night Raw	3.2/4.9	2.05 million
WCW Saturday Night	2.8/5.7	1.79 million
WCW Main Event	2.3/4.3	1.52 million
WWF Action Zone	2.1/6.0	1.35 million
WCW Pro	1.8/6.6	1.14 million
WWF Mania	1.3/3.3	845,000

COMBINED AVG.

WCW	2.3/5.5	1.47 million
WWF	2.2/4.7	1.40 million

FIRST QUARTER SPECIALS

Clash of the Champions (Jan./WCW)	3.5/5.6	2.16 million
Sunday Night Slam (Mar./WWF)	2.5/4.9	1.59 million

THE FIRST QUARTER

Show	Rating/Share	Total Homes
Mon. Night Raw	3.1/4.5	1.95 million
WCW Sat. Night	2.6/5.3	1.64 million
WCW Main Event	1.9/3.7	1.22 million
WWF Actn. Zone	1.8/5.3	1.17 million
WCW Pro	1.7/6.2	1.07 million
WWF Mania	1.3/3.8	838,000

Combined Averages

WWF	2.1/4.5	1.32 million
WCW	2.1/5.1	1.31 million

Even with the continued momentum for *Monday Night Raw*, ratings for the first quarter from the Big Two promotions have to be considered a dead heat for weekly series. While *WCW Saturday Night* showed significant improvement (18 per cent) over year-ago levels, the advantage for WCW shows appears to be stronger performance for its Sunday afternoon and Saturday morning hours.

Action Zone posted a strong March at 2.1, even opposite the NCAA basketball playoffs but the Sunday *Main Event* show, paced by its live performance in the hour prior to the memorable *WCW Uncensored*, scored its highest monthly average in more than three years with a 2.3. The showing lifted the series to a 1.9 to edge out *Zone* for the quarter.

Saturday mornings, *WCW Pro* topped a million homes to easily distance itself from *Mania*, which never could draw higher than a 1.7 during the month and posted seven 1.3 performances. In all, the USA/WWF shows only nudged out a 10,000-home margin over the WCW/TBS efforts.

The *Raw* momentum carried easily over into April. As of its April 24th airing, the show had scored a 3 rating or higher on ten consecutive weeks and had a string of 55 ratings wins in the last 58 head-to-head weeks (exempting pre-emptions).

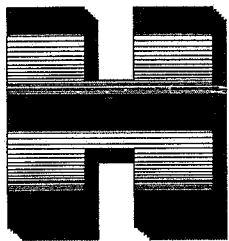
What will be interesting to watch is whether the increased ratings are seasonal or if they carry into the spring. As detailed in the page one story, *Raw* has just scored the highest monthly average for a weekly series since 1990 with its April numbers (3.7/5.5). If the USA series builds strong relationships to the added WWF pay-per-views, the ratings may continue hot. However, the WCW Saturday evening show is slipping back into the 2.2 average which has been typical for the Tony Schiavone-Bobby Heenan hour for the past three years. The Sunday hour wrapped up April at 1.9, slightly up from last year's January-March average. *Action Zone* is up a hair from the spring 1994 numbers for *All-American* but still has not posted breakaway ratings with its new format.

OTHER NOTES

Jim Crockett's *NWA Championship Wrestling* is still pulling 2 and 3 ratings in its 9 a.m. slot in Dallas, respectable for its independent slot....National cable rankings for the weekly shows have not been available since the O.J. Simpson trial began because the trial typically carries the bulk of the top 50 ratings (figured in half-hour intervals)....The new universes for the major cable networks: TBS is now seen in 64 million homes, USA in 63.5 million. As of March, every rating point equals 640,000 homes for WCW, 635,000 for WWF....Those Herb Abrams UWF reruns are drawing only hash mark ratings (not enough to measure) on ESPN2....Talk has died down of Titan cutting back to a single syndication show, particularly with the move to same-week satellite delivery of the shows.

Paul

Heyman Named Matwatch '95 Man of the Year



He made nearly a score of veteran promoters and announcers tear their hair out from the time he was a teenager. He is the only performer ever to have "fired" Gordon Solie on the air (see *Pro Wrestling This Week*, 1987). He rolled up a 3-0 legal record against World Championship Wrestling and dared to enter into a shouting match with Ric Flair in the dungeon of Atlanta's Center Stage. Now, he produces arguably the most controversial wrestling program in decades which has the most intense cult following of any mat show on the air.

While this publication has been highly critical of the reliance on openly gratuitous violence in Extreme Championship Wrestling, one can never deny Paul Heyman's ability to deliver what his specific audience wants to see....nor his innate sense to attract attention.

For creating both a firestorm of controversy and intensity of conversation in 1994, Paul Heyman is our choice as *Matwatch* Man of the Year.

In the Extreme product, Heyman has put together a cast of characters and style which distinctly defines his promotion as individual. You won't find Heyman fretting over whether his wrestlers sell merchandise or ride in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Individualism is the Heyman trademark.

As difficult as some promoters regarded Heyman in his early mat years as Paul E. Dangerously (or "Dangerly" as he was referred to in Memphis: "Jerry Jarrett insisted, 'This is Memphis, Tennessee. People here can't pronounce dangerously,'" Heyman once told us), they privately admired his creative mind.

"Paul was always a little flaky," former Continental Championship owner David Woods said in a 1989 interview, "but he was always full of ideas and they were usually good ones."

Heyman has perennially been one of the most astute behind-the-scenes analysts of the mat circuits, particularly of the mistakes his former organization, WCW, made before and after he was a part of it.

In the early years of Ted Turner's ownership of WCW, Heyman would say the problem with the organization catching on was "nothing was personal. For people to care about a feud, you have to make the issues personal. When Ric Flair came back after the Terry Funk attack, he should have come to the ring with a baseball bat."

The night Heyman and Eddie Gilbert parted company with Woods late in 1988, he was already planning his next career move. "I have the one team which can mean something personal against the Midnight Express," Heyman said that evening by telephone. "The team of Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose (the Original Midnight Express) has a built-in personal issue over the name Midnight Express." The ploy worked. The Midnights-Midnights feud gave a short-term shot in the arm for an NWA declining in the final weeks of Jim Crockett's ownership. A classic evening at the Columbus Municipal Auditorium in Georgia proved it. A Crockett TV taping dragged a relentless four hours. The 2,200 in the stands had endured squash match after squash

with little in the way of compelling dark matches to prop up their interest.

Heyman and Jim Cornette literally took off their coats, rolled up their sleeves and took command of the crowd in that evening's finale as a tour de force. Heyman had the place hovering with hate—at him—and enjoyed every solitary minute. That final bout in Columbus should have been taped as a textbook example for ringside managers.

Shortly before assuming his current role with ECW, Heyman was a commentator on The Real Wrestling Hotline. Paul was bluntly critical of Flair's refusal to put over Brian Pillman and Steve Austin for even one fall of a two-out-of-three bout at the June 1993 *Clash of the Champions*. "You had a chance to do what was done for you 20 years ago," Heyman commented. "You could have allowed Steve Austin to move into that elite category you moved into because somebody was willing to do it for you. The time is right for it. But you wouldn't do it, Ric. You just won't do it."

That Shane Douglas (Troy Martin) has moved into the forefront of ECW as "The Franchise" and champion and is the promotion's most open, caustic critic of Flair is no surprise. The script is vintage Heyman. In WCW, Paul was high on Douglas' ability and once told us of Douglas' long-term potential as a heel. "Five years from now, Troy Martin could be one of the biggest stars in wrestling," said Heyman, amidst our skepticism. "No, I know you and all of the hardcores will laugh at that. But the kid's got it in him."

Likewise, Heyman—while an admirer of Flair's ring work—has been outside the mainstream of former WCW loyalists. He believed Flair should have passed the baton several years ago, as evidenced by Douglas' ECW interviews. Shane is the voice of Heyman in much the same way as Julia Sugarbaker was for Linda Bloodworth-Thomason on *Designing Women*.

Heyman has reportedly been miffed at much of our criticism of the ECW style and format in its heavy reliance on brutality. However, one cannot deny Heyman knows his audience. Character-based, comic book-style wrestling would never work anywhere in Philadelphia. All-American boys are sheer suicide as babyfaces in Philly. Evidence of that was prime in a 1989 WCW Philadelphia pay-per-view when Douglas, as part of the beach boy idol Dynamic Dudes team, was booed out of the Civic Center while the heel Freebirds were almost carted off on the fans' shoulders.

(Continued on page 8)

Paul

(Continued from Page 7)

Heyman, accordingly, publicly embraced a term most wrestling veterans who jealously "protect" their business run from as if it were an approaching octopus: hardcore. ECW instituted a Hardcore Hotline. Its promotions were structured to appeal directly to the hardcore fan disenfranchised by WCW and the WWF. As such, Heyman booked shows which made no pretense of unplanned finishes. "It's as if Paul says, 'I know why you're here, so we may as well make the best of it,'" says a close follower of the ECW group.

In building the circuit, Heyman has attracted arguably the most talented group of workers (though "work" in ECW can frequently be defined as tablebusters and cane-wielders), particularly in the area of new stars—a concept which has failed the WCW/WWF combo of late. "Paul has done a better job than anybody in America of getting over new characters," Dave Meltzer said on a December 1994 edition of *The Real Wrestling Hotline's Reporters' Roundtable*. "A lot of bookers will throw a dozen new guys in the ring in a year and hope a couple of them stick. Paul's percentage is far greater than that."

The other keynote of distinction in ECW is Dangerously's decision to take the group in the direction of extreme violence. That, in itself, is only a major plus for the company's loyalists but has created serious concern for the long-term impact on its audience. ECW is definitely not a show for children. However, its most rabid adult fans frequently display juvenile behavior in the stands. A contingent, calling itself the ECW Mutants, regularly signs on Internet, boasting of either drinking heavily or "getting drunk" in the parking lot of the small arena where ECW runs its Philly shows. In recent months, increasing numbers of fans have handed wrestlers objects and weapons to use when action spills out of the ring. Publicly-aired concerns of the potential of alcohol and fan involvement in the violence have not fazed Heyman one iota. One recent show featured clips of a Singapore cane match, a dressing room brawl, two run-ins/pullaparts and the use of at least twelve boards. The only openly-displayed irritation was after the call by Terry Funk last summer for fans to toss chairs in the ring and more than a hundred seats went flying. The scene was one of the most bizarre in wrestling history. Reportedly, ECW owner Tod Gordon was angered, particularly considering the vulnerability of potential injury and liability.

To call Heyman irreverent is to display one of America's greatest acts of kindness. As he sees it, the rules of not acknowledging your competition or being fearful of their retaliation went out the window in ECW. In fact, Heyman goes out of his way to tantalize his bigger brethren, particularly WCW. If an *Extreme* show has as few as one satirical interview reference to World Championship Wrestling, that week's episode has to be considered benevolent. Between Douglas and the Public Enemy team, WCW has been verbally tarred and feathered, often with great humor.

Heyman has always been a promoter in his own right. He's never booked arenas, only images. He managed connections well enough to book WCW wraparound tapings at New York's China Club and had more than a token influence in Lawrence Taylor appearing at WCW's Meadowlands show on a snowy night in early 1991. Plus, he managed a spot with himself and Diamond Dallas Page around the same time on MTV's *Most Wanted* live Friday afternoon video countdown show. The camerawork was so dizzying it gave Heyman and some viewers a headache. But no one else in WCW could land the spot.

So imbedded was Heyman in some elements of the New York media, he was rumored in at least one entertainment publication to be a candidate to host a teen-oriented game show on Nickleodeon in late 1993.

Two instances reveal the Heyman touch of knowing his audience. One was after a recent ECW show in which the raucous crowd was ending with its usual chant of "ECW, ECW" and Heyman grabbed the house mike to insist the show was below par and asked the fans to stop their cheering. Despite the perennial image of the Paul E. Dangerously character, Heyman knows in the little arena of Philly, the paying customers know he is playing a role rather than creating reality.

A second situation erupted in the spring of 1995 when arguably the greatest bump-taker since Jushin Liger, Sabu, abruptly walked away from ECW to accept a series of Japan dates. Rather than attempt to fool the fans with a storyline, Heyman gave ECW's perspective on the story and insisted customers could stay free for the first half of the show and receive a refund if they were incensed over Sabu's non-appearance.

Heyman is one of the few independent bookers with the brass to stand up to wrestlers who decide to work for WCW and demand exclusivity, such is his competitive fire against his former employer. That is certainly not surprising, considering his penchant for speaking his mind during his three WCW tenures. No doubt, Heyman will never be considered for the Nobel Peace Prize.

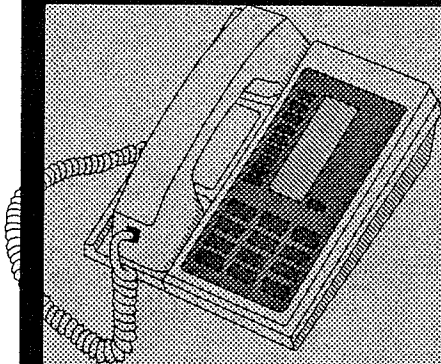
Some followers have asked a prime question in recent months: could Paul E. finally ascend to booking status in either of the Big Two? Likely, no—but as long as he is pulling the right strings in Philadelphia, he doesn't need to. The drawback: WCW expects people to be extremely corporate. While Paul would have no trouble wearing suits to work, his style of creativity would be stifled in the committee atmosphere of World Championship Wrestling. Besides, the question is moot with Hulk Hogan calling the shots. Vince McMahon has never used anyone as young as Heyman in a booking capacity. While Heyman is capable of adapting styles, the high-violence programs of ECW are not exactly a selling ticket to Stamford.

However, when one considers the organization which had the hardcore audience talking constantly in 1994, the answer was squarely *Extreme Championship Wrestling*. No matter how extreme, the atmosphere and consistency (even when consistently violent) sends the award for the 1994 *Matwatch Man of the Year* to Paul Heyman with a hope he eventually earns that teen game show.

Special Notice

In response to several readers who asked, "What happened to the *Man of the Year?*" in the last issue, Eddie Gilbert's death occurred the night we were wrapping up writing the last double issue, therefore, we held this story until this much-delayed issue in order to substitute a perspective on Eddie.

Despite some hollow, unfulfilled promises in the last issue, to make up for the delays in production, we are planning two regular-sized issues in the next 20 days. Mailing date for the next issue is tentatively scheduled for May 10 and for the second May 20. Hopefully, this will serve to make up the missed editions and place all subscriptions back on track.



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Post-Game Show
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In Early April

UFC Gets Big Draw, WWF Draws Top \$\$\$\$

NEW YORK—Based on upbeat projections from their *Ultimate Fighting Championship V*, executives of distributor Semaphore Entertainment Group are projecting a 2 per cent buy-rate for their July 14 sixth event. However, multisystem cable operators are openly critical of the World Wrestling Federation's \$34.95 (\$39.95 day-of-show) price tag for *Wrestlemania XI*.

While some published reports have listed a 1.5 per cent buy-rate for *UFC V*, Semaphore CEO Bob Meyrowitz called the fifth special "the most successful," generating "in excess of 1 per cent." Meyrowitz told *Multichannel News* the event performed well despite receiving less promotion than *Wrestlemania* and the Oliver McCall-Larry Holmes championship boxing card.

Meyrowitz called *UFC* "a major franchise now" and said the series now generates its own interest because of the event itself.

Because of the April performance, Meyrowitz told the magazine, "With the (cable) operator's help (in promotion) we can take this to a 2 per cent buy-rate."

However, the cable industry—in general—while probably making slightly higher revenues than last year, is souring on the price increases for the Titan Sports flagship special.

Multichannel News pay-per-view editor Tom Umstead quoted Lenfest Communications pay-per-view operations director Reed Rodman as saying, "I'm concerned about the higher prices because we're losing the marginal viewer." Rodman said Lenfest lost buys and revenue with *Wrestlemania XI* compared to last year's show.

Titan Sports pay-per-view vice president Skip Desjardin told the publication the event will likely fall "just short of last year's 438,000 buys," although he said it was too early to give specific numbers. Desjardin predicted higher revenues than last year. Several mat publications have openly disputed the claim of the 438,000 figure in 1994.

One publication has quoted Tele-Communications, Inc., officials as estimating the *Wrestlemania XI* buy-rate at an all-time low 1.1 per cent. However, TCI's pay-per-view administrator Jay Kreiling told *Multichannel* his systems drew a 1.7, down from an estimated 2.2 last year. But Kreiling added the company only broke even with advance estimates on the event.

Prime Cable ended up short on both buy-rate and revenue numbers, according to its national pay-per-view director, Colleen Galloway.

None of the cable operators, however, chalked up the buy-rate differentials to having too many major events

in the same week. Pam Moseley of Cablevision in Tucson said the events are all geared to different target audiences and did not feel the *UFC* and Titan audiences necessarily overlap each other in large proportions.

The July event will run head-on into competition from summer pay events of both Titan and World Championship Wrestling.

Lenfest put forth a heavy marketing effort which apparently won back subscribers who were angry with the early cutoff to December's *UFC* production.

Overall, the pay industry has been handed a recent estimate of \$75 million from wrestling by the analysts at Paul Kagan Associates. That figure may increase with the late add-ons by the *WWF* and *WCW*.

"Eventually, with 29 pay events in 1996 from the wrestling-*UFC* and action perspective, the viewer will have to become more selective," says Kim Kersey of Cablevision Industries. "Of course, we're going to market at a point to try to get every dollar we can but we can't place as much focus on each individual event. That area of pay-per-view will probably cost the consumer in excess of \$600 to buy every single event next year. Most of our customers just don't have that much disposal income, at the level of \$50 a month to put into pay-per-view."

Kersey predicts a number of marginal customers will return to the fold with the \$14.95 price tag on the *In Your House* series of *WWF* events. "We'll see less party viewing of pay-per-view events and perhaps recruit a few customers who have never tried pay-per-view," said Kersey. "But the quality has to be there if they keep coming back." Kersey says he knows of no plans to package the lower-priced pay events in a season ticket plan as *WCW* does with satellite dish owners for its pay-per-views.

Does the prospect of increasing events have the potential of diminishing return? "Perhaps," says Kersey. "We're going to market them as if they're the best viewers have ever seen but, realistically, most viewers will become selective. However, we do believe more dollars will be earned from the action pay-per-view market."



Incredible stories are filing through the on-line services, apparently surfacing from a new hotline, most highly exaggerated. One two weeks ago was about the umpteenth report of Sting's impending departure from WCW, which has been thoroughly squashed. The other, a report of seven unnamed wrestlers reportedly storming in to WCW management to complain about the Hulk Hogan-Eric Bischoff lock on the company. For one thing, Bischoff was in Korea and none of these guys were going to get access to new WCW chief Harvey Schiller....And another one floated on-line which Joe Pedicino himself had to squash. A report surfaced on Prodigy that Pedicino and Boni Blackstone left their NWA announcing roles because Jim Crockett could no longer pay them. Truth: Joe and Boni left because their new twice-weekly infomercial show in Atlanta is far more lucrative and they could not make the trips to Dallas on Tuesday nights....The new half-hour Ozark Mountain show is apparently getting some good attention in its Saturday evening slot in Jonesboro. KAIT will take a long look at the series' ratings in May. The show is on in three markets.

Vince McMahon was our choice two years ago, astoundingly, as the tube's top announcer because of his stellar work on *Monday Night Raw*. He may now be our choice the next-worst, just above Tony Schiavone. Have you listened to Vince lately, particularly on *Superstars* or *Raw*? In the Sid Vicious-Aldo Montoya and Bret Hart-Jimmy Del Ray bouts on *Superstars* April 29, Vince was almost unintelligible. He was as garbled with that high-pitched hype as Ted Kennedy is on the campaign stump. It's one thing to generate enthusiasm for the product—but I defy anyone to translate ten words Vince said during that Vicious-Montoya match.

Most improved show, production-wise: USWA. A new director is in charge of production. He's added snappier graphics, an inoffensive aerial camera angle, name identifiers on every interview and ring introduction, improved lighting and more dimension at the announce desk. There's little one can do to spruce up a studio show but it's happened in Memphis. Now if they could just get rid of that awful theme music....On the March 25 Memphis show, Lance Russell did an interview with Tommy Rich and Doug Gilbert which was the textbook segment for an announcer staring down two heels. Lance challenged them, aggressively forced them to defend their behavior and never backed up an inch. WCW should get a tape of that, take Schiavone, sit him down and say, "Okay, watch it until you get it right." But, for the most part, Bischoff has pulled Schiavone off of interviews, of late. Smart move.

A classic video from the Video Yesteryear people: a 1956 episode of *The Big Surprise*, a big-money quiz show during the scandal era. Appearing as a contestant: the legendary Ed (Strangler) Lewis, competing in the category of The Bible....Don't be surprised if Barry Houston is one of the next of the WCW training school jobbers to join Kenny Kendall and the Gambler in getting a push in Memphis. But if 7-2 Paul White is sent in for guest shots in Memphis, as is being speculated, expect some explosion from the WWF corner....Crockett's NWA and Sam Kent's North

(Continued on Page 12)



It's time we picked up some brainwaves from you on some specific questions which the mind ponders:

1) How seriously are you interested in the Ultimate Fighting Championship series and why or why should UFC not be covered in a wrestling newsletter?

2) Over the next 18 months, what do you predict will be the pulse of the pay-per-view buying public on WCW and why? Please try to divorce yourself from any emotions over what Hulk Hogan has done to Ric Flair's career.

3) Assuming you had a voice in pairing up announcing combinations for an organization's top cable and top syndicated show, what would be your Dream Team at the mic for each show and why?

Please give these three questions some serious thought and drop us a response in the next few weeks to:

MATWATCH '95
% Steve Beverly
165 Smith Chamberlain Rd.
Medina, Tn. 38355

As Time Goes By

(Continued from Page 11)

Georgia series have moved to WVEU-TV 69 in Atlanta but at the ghastly 2:30-4:30 a.m. time periods.... *Superstars*, which had been sentenced to a midnight time slot on WFLD Chicago, gained a reprieve to a 10 a.m. Sunday slot as part of a four-hour action block leading into NHL games on Fox....WCW is drawing less than a 1 rating in Los Angeles with its 1:15 a.m. Monday slot on KNBC.

WWF is running disguised ads through a talent search agency in the leading broadcasting trades as a cattle call for new announce talent. Too bad WCW doesn't see the need to do the same thing....A genuine shame Chris Cruise and Mike Tenay can't get a better break on the major WCW shows. They deserve better. Tenay was simply miscast at the *WCW Unplugged* pay-per-view in the Gene Okerlund role. Mike proved at *When Worlds Collide* he is one of the best-prepared analysts around.

Parting thought: is it my imagination, or is Hogan moving even slower than ever? That run down the aisle he made for the save at the end of the recent Flair/Anderson vs. Armstrong/Horner bout was slower than most of the turtles in my backyard.

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